



A rich educational legacy

Area colleges are a boon to business, economy

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

The immigrants who flocked to the Lackawanna Valley in the late 19th and early 20th century traveled lightly — often with just the clothes on their backs and a small suitcase. But they came laden with traditions and values that survived their arduous journeys.

Traveling from all over Europe and speaking different languages, they had important things in common — the desire for a better life for their families, a strong work ethic and an appreciation for the importance of education.

Educational opportunities beyond high school in the Lackawanna Valley were tied to the economic fortunes of the region. As industries grew and prospered, schools were needed to educate and train local residents. Scranton was a thriving city and provided fertile ground for the growth of educational institutions.

International Correspondence Schools (ICS) was founded in the 1880s to prepare miners for a state test required for a foreman's license. ICS introduced self-study, the forerunner of today's distance learning. ICS expanded into various subject areas and became a major industry, employing 3,200 workers and educating more than 3 million students throughout the country. Talk about economic development!

In 1888, the first Bishop of Scranton established St. Thomas of Aquinas College. It became the University of Scranton in 1938 and was taken over by the Jesuits in 1942. Known as the “working man's school,” it provided an opportunity for higher education for many students who were the first in their family to attend college. Families of modest means sacrificed so that their sons could build better lives.

Most students lived at home until the past few decades. The demographics have changed since then, and many of today's students, male and female, are second- and third-generation college graduates and come from distant states and countries and live on campus.

In 1894, the Scranton Business College, a private entity, was formed to meet the need for managers and support personnel for the coal, railroad and textile industries. As times changed, the school adapted, training women during World War II and, after the war, educating veterans. In 1957, it became a public nonprofit institution known as Lackawanna Junior College. In 1996, it was reborn as Lackawanna College, home to a police academy, environmental institute and many other programs geared to new technology. Recently, it partnered with Lehigh University to allow local students to earn an engineering degree through Lackawanna. In 2009, Lackawanna College's

facilities will provide a temporary home for the first class of students of the proposed medical college in Scranton. The medical school will bring a whole new dimension to the local economy, not to mention its impact on the health-care delivery system.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) founded Marywood College in 1915, offering higher education to women of all faiths and backgrounds. The role of women was beginning to change. Women were preparing to be teachers, and they also strived to enter other careers. The school is now Marywood University, a coeducational institution that offers an array of undergraduate and graduate programs.

Founded in 1918, Johnson College provided students with the technical skills and general education needed to succeed in industry. Formerly known as Johnson Trade School, it was a direct offspring of the region's need for skilled workers. With a faculty that brings years of industrial experience to the classroom, Johnson College prepares its students to fulfill the needs of the workplace.

In 1923, the Pennsylvania State College established an evening technical institute program in Scranton. By 1997, the Worthington Scranton Campus joined eleven other branch locations to become part of the University's Commonwealth College. It now grants Penn State baccalaureate degrees from its Dunmore campus.

Keystone College began as Keystone Academy, a private high school chartered in 1868. It became a junior college in 1934. Today it offers four-year degrees in a variety of subject areas. Each major study area in its career-oriented liberal arts curriculum requires the student to complete a practicum to qualify for graduation.

The values of our ancestors set the stage for the educational institutions in the Lackawanna Heritage Valley. Our colleges and universities sustain our communities intellectually, socially and spiritually as well as economically. In northeastern Pennsylvania, ethnic pride is strong, but so is the legacy of working together with neighbors from different cultures. Our schools bring diversity to their campuses and the same patterns repeat themselves. The sheer numbers of students, faculty and staff inevitably create economic growth. The presidents of the six colleges have formed a consortium that meets regularly to explore collaboration for the betterment of the community. The spirit of the immigrants lives on!

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